

Message Text

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ORIGIN INR-10

INFO OCT-01 EUR-12 ISO-00 NEA-10 PM-05 SP-02 SS-15
SSO-00 NSCE-00 CIAE-00 NSAE-00 INRE-00 DODE-00
PA-01 ACDA-12 HA-05 IO-13 SSM-03 L-03 /092 R

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APPROVED BY INR: M PACKMAN
INR/RNA: P H STODDARD
NR/RNA/NE: P J GRIFFIN
NEA: W BRUBECK
NEA/RA: J MONTVILLE
EUR/RPM: T SAVAGE

-----004061 232012Z /42

O 231827Z FEB 78
FM SECSTATE WASHDC
TO USMISSION USNATO IMMEDIATE

S E C R E T STATE 047001

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: NATO, XF, XI

SUBJECT: MEETING OF NATO MIDDLE EAST EXPERTS

REF: USNATO 674

THERE FOLLOWS THE TEXT OF SECTION I (ENTITLED ARAB-ISRAELI
CONFLICT) OF THE PAPER TO BE PRESENTED BY THE US
REPRESENTATIVE (MR. MONTVILLE) AT THE MEETING OF MIDDLE
EAST EXPERTS SCHEDULED TO CONVENE ON FEBRUARY 28.
SECTIONS II THRU V OF THE US PAPER, WHICH CONFORM TO THE
REQUIREMENTS SET FORTH IN THE NATO OUTLINE, WERE POUCHED
TO BRUSSELS ON FEBRUARY 13. IT SHOULD BE NOTED THAT
SECTION I CONSISTS OF 14 RPT 14 PARAGRAPHS INSTEAD OF 12
AS ORIGINALLY ESTIMATED.

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I. ARAB-ISRAELI CONFLICT

A. EGYPT-ISRAEL TALKS

(1) RESULTS AND POSSIBLE DEVELOPMENTS

1. SADAT'S DRAMATIC PEACE INITIATIVE FOLLOWED GROWING FEARS IN EGYPT THAT PROCEDURAL DISPUTES COULD STALL

THE PEACE PROCESS INDEFINITELY. CONCERNED FOR A VARIETY OF REASONS THAT THE PROSPECTS OF PEACE WERE SLIPPING THROUGH HIS FINGERS, SADAT CONCLUDED THAT A BOLD, UNILATERAL ACTION WAS NECESSARY. THEREFORE, HE ANNOUNCED TO THE PEOPLE'S ASSEMBLY ON NOVEMBER 9 HIS READINESS TO ADDRESS THE KNESSET IN SEARCH OF PEACE. BEGIN RESPONDED BY INVITING HIM, AND SADAT FLEW TO JERUSALEM ON NOVEMBER 19.

2. IN A MEASURED SPEECH TO THE KNESSET AND IN EXTENSIVE TALKS WITH BEGIN AND OTHER ISRAELI LEADERS, SADAT PRESENTED THE MODERATE ARAB POSITION AND STRESSED HIS INTENTION TO WORK FOR A COMPREHENSIVE SETTLEMENT, INCLUDING THE NORMALIZATION OF ARAB-ISRAELI RELATIONS, ISRAELI WITHDRAWAL FROM OCCUPIED ARAB TERRITORIES, AND THE RECOGNITION OF PALESTINIAN RIGHTS.

3. SHORTLY AFTER HIS RETURN, SADAT CALLED FOR A MEETING IN CAIRO TO PREPARE FOR A COMPREHENSIVE PEACE CONFERENCE TO BE HELD LATER IN GENEVA. THE CAIRO CONFERENCE CONVENED ON DECEMBER 14, BUT IT SOON EVOLVED INTO A HOLDING ACTION, WHILE HIGHER LEVEL DIRECT TALKS TOOK PLACE. FOLLOWING THE ANNOUNCEMENT BY SADAT ON

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DECEMBER 18 THAT HE WOULD INVITE BEGIN TO VISIT EGYPT, THEY MET IN ISMAILIA ON CHRISTMAS. BOTH MEN LEFT THE MEETING SOMEWHAT SOBERED BY THE REALIZATION OF THE DIFFICULT NEGOTIATIONS WHICH STILL FACED THEM. SADAT HAD HOPED TO OBTAIN A MUTUALLY AGREEABLE DECLARATION OF PRINCIPLES ON WITHDRAWAL AND READINESS TO SOLVE THE PALESTINIAN PROBLEM, BUT THIS WAS MORE THAN BEGIN WAS WILLING TO CONCEDE. BEGIN, IN TURN, PRESENTED WHAT HE CONSIDERED AN EXTREMELY FORTHCOMING PEACE PLAN. THE EGYPTIANS, HOWEVER, VIEWED THIS AS AN INADEQUATE ISRAELI RESPONSE TO SADAT'S INITIATIVE.

4. NEVERTHELESS, BEGIN AND SADAT AGREED TO CONVENE FOLLOW-ON MEETINGS OF DEFENSE MINISTERS IN CAIRO AND FOREIGN MINISTERS IN JERUSALEM TO ENABLE NEGOTIATIONS TO CONTINUE. SADAT, HOWEVER, WAS INCREASINGLY DISTURBED BY WHAT HE PERCEIVED AS A HARDLINE ISRAELI STANCE, AND, FOLLOWING A PARTICULARLY TACTLESS STATEMENT BY BEGIN AT A SOCIAL EVENT FOR THE DELEGATES TO THE POLITICAL TALKS, HE SUSPENDED EGYPTIAN PARTICIPATION BY ORDERING FOREIGN MINISTER KAMEL BACK TO CAIRO. AT THE SAME TIME, BEGIN WAS FACING GROWING OPPOSITION FROM HIS OWN FOLLOWERS

FOR BEING TOO COMPROMISING WITH THE EGYPTIANS. BEGIN'S DOUBTS WERE COMPOUNDED BY A SERIES OF PERSONAL ATTACKS ON THE ISRAELI PRIME MINISTER IN THE EGYPTIAN PRESS.

5. IN ORDER TO BREATHE LIFE INTO HIS FALTERING INITIATIVE, SADAT TRAVELED TO WASHINGTON IN EARLY FEBRUARY. HE REMAINED DISAPPOINTED THAT THE ISRAELIS HAD FAILED ADEQUATELY TO RESPOND TO HIS DRAMATIC GESTURE AND WAS PARTICULARLY DISTURBED BY THE ISRAELI POSITION ON THE SINAI SETTLEMENTS, PALESTINIAN SELF-DETERMINATION, AND WITHDRAWAL FROM THE WEST BANK AND GAZA. DESPITE HIS CONCERN OVER THESE ISSUES, SADAT LEFT WASHINGTON WITH RENEWED DETERMINATION TO PRESS ON WITH THE PEACE PROCESS.

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THE US POSITION

6. BEGINNING LAST SUMMER, THE US, IN AN EFFORT TO FACILITATE THE SEARCH FOR PEACE IN THE MIDDLE EAST, ENDEAVORED TO OBTAIN AGREEMENT BY ALL PARTIES ON A WORKING PAPER THAT COULD SERVE AS THE BASIS FOR RECONVENING THE GENEVA CONFERENCE. THESE IDEAS WERE PURSUED WITH FOREIGN MINISTERS IN SEPTEMBER AND OCTOBER. FAILING TO ARRIVE AT A MUTUALLY ACCEPTABLE WORKING PAPER, THE US PROPOSED GOING TO GENEVA WITHOUT ANY WORKING PAPER. SADAT AGREED, BUT SYRIA FAILED TO RESPOND AND ISRAEL HAD SOME OBJECTIONS. SADAT APPEARED CONCERNED THAT THE PROCESS WAS INDEFINITELY STALLED AND DECIDED TO STRIKE OUT ON HIS OWN.

7. AFTER SADAT'S TRIP TO JERUSALEM THE US ROLE IN THE PEACE EFFORT CHANGED. ALTHOUGH THE US WAS NOT CONSULTED IN ADVANCE, SECRETARY VANCE'S VISIT TO CAIRO AND JERUSALEM IN EARLY DECEMBER PROVIDED AN OPPORTUNITY TO SHOW SUPPORT FOR SADAT'S INITIATIVE. THE SECRETARY AND SADAT AGREED THAT THE EGYPTIANS AND ISRAELIS SHOULD ESCHEW A BILATERAL AGREEMENT AND WORK FOR A COMPREHENSIVE SETTLEMENT AND AN EVENTUAL RECONVENING OF GENEVA. IN CONTRAST TO THE PREVIOUS PATTERN IN WHICH THE US WAS OUT FRONT, IT NOW MOVED INTO A FACILITATIVE ROLE AS NEEDED.

8. WHEN ISRAELI/EGYPTIAN RELATIONS BEGAN TO SOUR FOLLOWING THE ISMAILIA CONFERENCE, THE US WAS ONCE AGAIN ENCOURAGED TO ASSUME A MORE ACTIVE ROLE. IN ADDITION TO SUSTAINING SADAT'S DETERMINATION IN PURSUING HIS INITIATIVE TO A FRUITFUL CONCLUSION, THE PURPOSE OF THE
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US MEDIATION EFFORT IS TO FORGE AN EARLY AGREEMENT OF THE PARTIES ON A SET OF PRINCIPLES THAT WOULD:

--SERVE AS THE BASIS FOR A COMPREHENSIVE MIDDLE EAST SETTLEMENT; AND

--SET THE STAGE FOR RESUMPTION OF THE EGYPTIAN-ISRAELI POLITICAL TALKS.

(2) REACTIONS IN OTHER ARAB COUNTRIES

9. ARAB REACTION TO SADAT'S VISIT TO JERUSALEM RANGED FROM STUNNED SURPRISE TO DISMAY. MANY ARABS CHARGED THAT ARAB UNITY WAS BROKEN, AND, DESPITE EGYPTIAN DISCLAIMERS, SUSPICIONS WERE AROUSED THAT A BILATERAL DEAL WAS IN THE OFFING. SADAT HAD DISCUSSED THE JERUSALEM TRIP WITH ASSAD TWO DAYS BEFORE THE EVENT BUT REFUSED TO BE DISSUADED BY SYRIAN OBJECTIONS.

10. SYRIA WAS CONCERNED THAT SADAT WAS GIVING UP EVERYTHING WITH LITTLE PROSPECT OF GETTING MUCH IN RETURN AND FEARED THAT SADAT MIGHT FORCE DAMASCUS TO FACE ISRAEL ALONE BY SIGNING A BILATERAL AGREEMENT. CONSEQUENTLY, ASSAD JOINED SADAT'S ARAB CRITICS (ALGERIA, PDRY, IRAQ, AND THE PALESTINIANS) AT THE TRIPOLI SUMMIT, WHICH WAS CONVENED BY QADHAFI TO CONDEMN SADAT'S ACTIONS AND TO CONSIDER COUNTERMEASURES. WHILE ASSAD WAS ABLE TO PREVENT THE SUMMIT FROM TOTALLY REJECTING THE PEACE PROCESS, HE WENT ALONG WITH A SERIES OF TOKEN MEASURES AGAINST EGYPT INCLUDING THE FREEZING OF RELATIONS. SYRIA HAS NOT, DESPITE ITS CRITICISM OF SADAT, DISAVOWED THE PEACE PROCESS AS SUCH AND CONTINUES TO WELCOME BILATERAL DIALOGUE WITH THE US.

11. THE IRAQI DELEGATION WITHDREW FROM THE SUMMIT BECAUSE IT COULD NOT CONVINCE THE OTHERS TO REJECT A

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NEGOTIATED SETTLEMENT ALTOGETHER. DESPITE REPEATED EFFORTS TO RECONCILE IRAQI-SYRIAN DIFFERENCES AND BRING BAGHDAD INTO A UNITED ANTI-SADAT FRONT, THE IRAQIS REFUSED TO PARTICIPATE IN A SECOND SUMMIT, THIS TIME IN ALGIERS.

12. SADAT WENT THE TRIPOLI SUMMITEERS ONE BETTER AND BROKE RELATIONS WITH THEM. HE DID NOT BREAK RELATIONS

WITH THE PLO, BUT HE SHOWED THAT HE WAS FED UP WITH ITS LEADERSHIP, INCLUDING ARAFAT, FOR HAVING BUNGLED OPPORTUNITIES BRINGING THE PALESTINIANS INTO THE PEACE EFFORT. HE BEGAN TO CAST ABOUT FOR AN ALTERNATIVE LEADERSHIP ON THE WEST BANK AND IN GAZA, THOUGH NO CREDIBLE ALTERNATIVE HAS YET EMERGED.

13. SADAT'S INITIATIVE ALSO INITIALLY DISTRESSED THE SAUDIS, WHO URGED HIM TO GO SLOWLY. ALTHOUGH STILL SKEPTICAL OF HIS PROSPECTS FOR SUCCESS AND CONCERNED ABOUT THE EFFECT OF HIS INITIATIVE ON ARAB UNITY, THE

SAUDIS PRIVATELY AND CAUTIOUSLY HAVE BEEN SUPPORTIVE OF HIS EFFORTS.

14. MOROCCO, SUDAN, AND OMAN WERE THE ONLY ARAB STATES WHICH OPENLY SUPPORTED SADAT. HE INITIALLY ENJOYED GREAT SYMPATHY IN SEVERAL OTHER STATES, BUT THEY PREFERRED TO BE NONCOMMITAL IN PUBLIC. FURTHER, WHAT IS VIEWED IN THE ARAB WORLD AS AN INTRANSIGENT ISRAELI POSITION HAS LED TO QUESTIONING OF THE WISDOM OF SADAT'S INITIATIVE EVEN AMONG FRIENDLY STATES. HOPE STILL EXISTS, HOWEVER, THAT AFTER A STATEMENT OF PRINCIPLES FOR A COMPREHENSIVE SETTLEMENT IS NEGOTIATED BY ISRAEL AND EGYPT, JORDAN CAN BE CONVINCED TO JOIN THE DISCUSSIONS SOON THEREAFTER. VANCE

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Message Attributes

Automatic Decaptioning: X
Capture Date: 01 jan 1994
Channel Indicators: n/a
Current Classification: UNCLASSIFIED
Concepts: TEXT, DOCUMENTS, MEETING AGENDA, POLITICAL SITUATION
Control Number: n/a
Copy: SINGLE
Draft Date: 23 feb 1978
Decaption Date: 01 jan 1960
Decaption Note:
Disposition Action: RELEASED
Disposition Approved on Date:
Disposition Case Number: n/a
Disposition Comment: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Date: 20 Mar 2014
Disposition Event:
Disposition History: n/a
Disposition Reason:
Disposition Remarks:
Document Number: 1978STATE047001
Document Source: CORE
Document Unique ID: 00
Drafter: M G BANNERMAN:DLM
Enclosure: n/a
Executive Order: GS
Errors: N/A
Expiration:
Film Number: D780084-0736
Format: TEL
From: STATE
Handling Restrictions: n/a
Image Path:
ISecure: 1
Legacy Key: link1978/newtext/t19780221/aaaaaren.tel
Line Count: 256
Litigation Code IDs:
Litigation Codes:
Litigation History:
Locator: TEXT ON-LINE, ON MICROFILM
Message ID: 4a3808d1-c288-dd11-92da-001cc4696bcc
Office: ORIGIN INR
Original Classification: SECRET
Original Handling Restrictions: n/a
Original Previous Classification: n/a
Original Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Page Count: 5
Previous Channel Indicators: n/a
Previous Classification: SECRET
Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Reference: 78 USNATO 674
Retention: 0
Review Action: RELEASED, APPROVED
Review Content Flags:
Review Date: 22 mar 2005
Review Event:
Review Exemptions: n/a
Review Media Identifier:
Review Release Date: n/a
Review Release Event: n/a
Review Transfer Date:
Review Withdrawn Fields: n/a
SAS ID: 3501074
Secure: OPEN
Status: NATIVE
Subject: MEETING OF NATO MIDDLE EAST EXPERTS
TAGS: PORG, PINT, XF, XI, US, NATO
To: USNATO
Type: TE
vdkgvwkey: odb://SAS/SAS.dbo.SAS_Docs/4a3808d1-c288-dd11-92da-001cc4696bcc
Review Markings:
Sheryl P. Walter
Declassified/Released
US Department of State
EO Systematic Review
20 Mar 2014
Markings: Sheryl P. Walter Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 20 Mar 2014